



# Department of Justice

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**SENIOR MEMBER OF FARC NARCO-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION**  
**SENTENCED TO SIXTY YEARS FOR HOSTAGE-TAKING CONSPIRACY**

WASHINGTON - Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera Pineda, aka Simon Trinidad, 56, a senior member of the designated Foreign Terrorist Organization Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC, was sentenced to 60 years' incarceration by a federal judge in Washington, D.C. today for his role in a conspiracy to engage in the hostage-taking of three American citizens in the Republic of Colombia, Assistant Attorney General for National Security Kenneth L. Wainstein and District of Columbia U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Taylor announced today.

In imposing the sentence, Judge Royce C. Lamberth characterized the hostage-taking crime as an act of terrorism that was heinous, barbaric, and "against the law of all civilized nations." The court noted the mental torture the families of the hostages continue to endure.

Under the advisory sentencing guidelines, Palmera faced a maximum sentence of life in prison; however, prosecutors asked the court to not impose a sentence greater than 60 years in order to comply with the terms of an extradition agreement with Colombia, requiring the court to impose a term of years rather than life in prison.

The U.S. Government remains committed to the safe recovery of all the hostages, including the three Americans being held in Colombia. We hold the hostage-takers responsible for the hostages' safety and call for their immediate release.

According to the government's evidence presented during a four-week trial last summer, the American hostages were conducting aerial counter-drug surveillance in rural Colombia on Feb. 13, 2003, when their small Cessna airplane experienced engine failure and crash-landed in the southern state of Caqueta. Heavily armed FARC guerrillas immediately surrounded the plane and brutally executed two of the occupants, an American pilot named Thomas Janis, and a Colombian national, Luis Alcides Cruz. The other three men, Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, and Thomas Howes, have been held hostage by the FARC ever since.

On April 27, 2003, the FARC issued a communiqué taking credit for the abduction of the three Americans and making certain demands of the government of Colombia in exchange for the release of the Americans and other political hostages then held by the FARC. The communiqué announced that defendant Palmera was the FARC's spokesperson and representative for these negotiations. Eight months later, on Jan. 2, 2004, Ricardo Palmera was arrested in Quito, Ecuador, in possession of false identification he admitted he illegally obtained in Ecuador to allow him to travel abroad to serve as FARC spokesperson in the hostage-taking conspiracy. Palmera was deported to Colombia the next day, and he was extradited to the United States to face charges in this case on Dec. 31, 2004.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kenneth Kohl and John Crabb Jr. Assistance was provided by Justice Department prosecutors Timothy Reardon and Barbara Berman of the Counterterrorism Section of the National Security Division, Thomas Black of the Office of International Affairs of the Criminal Division, Justice Attachés Jerold McMillen and Peter Vincent of the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section, stationed at the American Embassy in Bogota, and former Assistant U.S. Attorney John A. Beasley, who indicted this case. In addition, members of the Colombian national police and military who traveled to Washington, D.C., and the Fiscalía General de la Nación contributed litigation support to the case.

Principal investigators of the case include special agents on the Extraterritorial Squad of the FBI Miami Division, in particular FBI Special Agents Joseph Deters, Oscar Montoto, Manny Ortega, Chris Carboneau, Ken Jett, Robert Webb, and Supervisory Special Agent Alex Barbeito. U.S. Attorney's Office Paralegal Amber Wetzels; Victim/Witness Assistance Advocates Dawn Tolson-Hightower and Yvonne Bryant; Litigation Support Specialists Kimberly Smith, Ronald Royal and Oliver John-Baptist; and Intern Richard Mo contributed to the successful investigation of this case as well. Several Colombian citizens courageously came forward to testify about other kidnapping crimes committed by Ricardo Palmera that were relevant to the case.

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